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DISCUSSION.

IN WHAT SENSE TWO PERSONS PERCEIVE THE SAME THING.

UNDER this heading there appears, in *THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW* of September, 1907, an article by Professor George Stuart Fullerton.

The question is closely related to the fundamental Philosophy (as yet undeveloped) that underlies the Theory of Probability. In this review I will not discuss the Philosophy of Probability, but I desire to call attention to some of the doctrines expressed by Professor Fullerton. And I desire to do this because the doctrines seem to be the prevailing doctrines of the day, and yet, in my opinion, they are ill adapted to a Philosophy of Probability. The prevalence of these doctrines is in my opinion the chief cause why the Philosophy of Probability is undeveloped.

The caption at the head of this article implies that two, and therefore presumably any number of people, may and in fact do perceive the same thing. And Professor Fullerton seems so to hold.

I do not think this is true in an unrestricted sense, if true in any intelligible sense at all.

If a large number of persons perceive the same thing, the thing so perceived must be independent of the peculiar mode of perception of each person. What each perceives therefore will be the 'thing in itself,' objectively, whatever that may mean.

Otherwise expressed, if a large number, or if only two persons perceive the same thing, the act of perception and the thing perceived are independent of each other;—the thing is in no sense a product of the perception;—the perception has nothing whatever to do with determining what the thing perceived is;—the thing perceived is 'the thing in itself,' whatever that may mean, and I confess I do not know what it can mean.

Is such a doctrine tenable?

Even in popular language, I can have no idea of a distinct thing unless I determine in advance certain mental limitations, express or implied;—unless, in the language of Philosophy, I determine in advance the 'mental universe of discourse' in respect to which the thing is to be determined.

For example, I suppose we will all admit that for certain purposes

and within certain restrictions, within a limited universe of discourse, John Smith is, to you and to me and to himself, a thing;—he is a man. But how long has he been a thing and how long will he be a thing and what is he? If he is a 'thing in itself,' it would seem that his existence should be independent of particular times and places and conditions. What was he one hundred years ago? What will he be one hundred years hence? He should of course be the same as now, for by hypothesis he is a 'thing in itself,' the same 'yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' and in all places and under all conditions. Certainly I do not perceive any such 'thing in itself.' And yet this is the only meaning that I can give to two persons perceiving the same thing, unrestrictedly, in unlimited universes of discourse.

If it be urged that a thing may be a 'thing in itself' and yet may change its qualities and relations in time and in place and may even change its substance and quantity, then what is there, subjectively or objectively, to determine when the thing ceases to be the same thing and becomes another thing? It is impossible for me to attach any definite meaning to a thing independently of an arbitrary mental universe of discourse, and of the determination by me of some particular case therein under a conflux of general descriptions in my mind, believed by me to apply to and to determine the objective thing.

We may express the same idea differently by saying that it is impossible to separate the thing perceived from the act of perceiving it, except temporarily in attention. In perception, I may temporarily fix attention either on the subjective mode or on the objective thing, but in fact these are simply different sides of one experience.

In order to think we must limit our universes of discourse, and the limitation of the universe is part of the determination or definition of the thing. And no person can define accurately his own universe of discourse, much less that of other people.

Consider causation for example. Causation has no meaning in an unlimited universe of discourse, for cause and effect then merge and become one and indistinguishable in the First Cause. So with regard to the category of time;—we must limit the time within which we determine things, otherwise they ultimately lose their identity and become merged in the universal cosmos. Again relation is a necessary category, and each thing is known, not absolutely in itself, but only in relations to myself and to other things. But, unless I limit my universe of discourse, relations cease to exist, for my thoughts of any one thing in an unlimited universe would require me to relate it to all things and all things to it, and all things would thus merge into one. In unlimited universes of

discourse there is no determinate thought and no independent things, and no evidence and no synthetic propositions, and no beliefs, and no probabilities, and no knowledge in any sense intelligible to my mind, for every thing is simply One, in the First Cause.

This is the starting point of the Philosophy of Probability, namely, that to some extent the thing perceived is determined by the act of perception, which is always in a limited universe of discourse.

Is the act of perception then wholly arbitrary and subject to no law? Is there any distinction between perception and empty imagination?

The distinction is this. Perceptions, beliefs, different parts of knowledge, must agree with each other, but acts of imagination need not. Thus the test of the truth of any belief is whether it agrees or not with other beliefs. Perception is simply a belief that the subjective descriptions that I attribute in thought to the objective thing do actually apply and determine the thing. And my belief is based on its consistency with all my other beliefs. Certain sensations exist in my mind. They are known to me in terms of certain qualities and relations, which may be called their descriptions. The sensations are changes in my sensibility. Every change must have a cause. I am compelled to ask myself the causes of the sensations in my mind. I can not believe that I am the First Cause. I am compelled to surmise and hypothecate an external cause. From the descriptions of my sensations, the effects, I infer the corresponding descriptions of the hypothetical external cause called by me the thing, the object. This is both internal and external perception. It is an inference from evidence. The inference must agree with all other beliefs, which other beliefs constitute the evidence. Hence it is impossible to separate perception from hypothesis and evidence and inference, for these are what constitute the perception.

My Intellect is one organic whole. This is what gives unity to all my experience. Attention divides the unity into temporary parts called things. But except for the unity under the Intellect there could be no differentiation in Attention and thus no things. The differentiations in Attention, and therefore things, are merely temporary. Through reflexion, there is always 'Return to Self.' The individual thing always becomes reabsorbed in the universal cosmos. I may in attention separate any part of my experience and call it a separate experience, but the existence and knowledge of the separate experience rest on the background of the unity in all experience. Reflexion soon merges the present individual experience into the totality of all experience and Attention wanders to some other parts.

In order therefore that a thing should be exactly the same thing to two persons they must have the same idea of the universal cosmos, and they must in Attention divide this universal cosmos in imagination in the same way, and they must fix Attention on the same part, and must assign in belief to that part the same descriptions.

Modern philosophy professes to adopt the doctrine that neither the individual thing nor the general idea is the '*primum cognitum*,' but that these are known only in relations to each other. But it seems to me that in practice modern philosophy in general is not true to this doctrine, and herein lies the difficulty in connection with our present subject.

In the doctrine of Professor Fullerton that two persons perceive the same thing, independently of the '*percepts*' in the mind of each, it seems to me there is the covert subtle unconscious assumption that the mind knows the '*thing-in-itself*' independently of the general description under which the thing is determined in thought, and therefore that the '*thing-in-itself*' is the '*primum cognitum*.' The same assumption seems to me to lie also in the doctrine that we can "*argue from particulars to particulars*," without the intervention of generalities;—and also in the doctrine of immediate direct intuition, or '*simple apprehension*' of the objective thing;—and even, though perhaps not quite so patently, in Kant's doctrine, that though the subjective side of experience is one, under the '*Unity of Apprehension*,' yet the objective side is manifold, as given in the '*Manifold of Sense*,' thus implying that the unity in the objective is not an actual real unity but merely technically artificially imposed on the objective by the subjective as a convenient fiction, for the better understanding of the objective by the subjective;—and also this same subtle unconscious supposedly repudiated doctrine, that the '*thing in itself*' is in fact the '*primum cognitum*,' seems to me to permeate nearly all modern thought, despite all professions to the contrary.

The false idea seems to be that generalities are products of thought and in no sense conditions of thought. We are supposed first to observe things, as if '*things in themselves*.' We then analyze these things and find stored in each certain qualities and properties and relations. We note that many things possess the same qualities and properties and relations. We thus classify and generalize and arrive at general laws and inductions. This is the way we are supposed to arrive at concepts and general notions. The words generality and concept by their etymology indicate this supposed process.

On this false idea, the doctrine that two people perceive the same

thing seems very simple. But when we remember that general descriptions are not only products of thought but conditions of thought and must be either prior to or at least simultaneous with all thought, it becomes at once obvious that there can be no thing independently of the subjective mode of perception and therefore that no two people can be said strictly to perceive the same thing unless they perceive it in the same subjective modes and under the same limitations, which is practically impossible.

Professor Fullerton makes the following quotation from Professor Pearson:

"No better way of realizing the different selective powers of diverse perceptive faculties can be found than a walk (of a man) with a dog. The man looks upon a broad landscape, and the signs of life and activity that he sees in the far distance may have a deep meaning to him. The dog surveys the same landscape indifferently, but his whole attention is devoted to matters in his more immediate neighborhood, of which the man is only indirectly conscious through the activity of the dog."

In claiming, against Professor Pearson, that the man and the dog here perceive the same landscape, Professor Fullerton, it seems to me, assumes that the landscape can, objectively in fact, be severed from all else in nature and made an independent 'thing in itself,' and that it is the isolated independent landscape thus severed from all else that is perceived both by the man and the dog, alike, though through different 'percepts' in the mind of each. But objectively, in fact, the landscape can not be physically severed from its surroundings, nor can I so conceive it, except by a temporary and arbitrary limitation of attention that carries no belief with it, and that thus can not be made the basis of a perception. The landscape is part of the whole of nature and can not be severed from it. When I perceive the landscape I must locate it somewhere in nature and fix its place therein. Nor can I draw the line and say what is in the landscape and what not. The dog must do the same thing if his mental action may be called a 'perception.' But his determination of where the landscape begins and where it ends will be very different from mine, and his relating of the landscape to nature in general will be very different from mine. I find it very difficult to define accurately any unqualified sense in which the dog and the man can be said to perceive strictly the same landscape.

The same difficulties apply to the doctrine that any one man perceives the same thing twice, including Mill's doctrine that the

major premise of every induction is the 'uniformity of nature.' From a purely objective standpoint, it is difficult for me to attach any definite meaning to the 'uniformity of nature.'

The value of this discussion consists, it seems to me, not so much in the solution of the particular question in dispute, but in the determinations of the meaning of perception and the meaning of things, which determinations constitute the foundation of philosophy in general and of the Philosophy of Probability in particular.

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